

REMARKS OF MR. SIMON AMESTOY  
Meeting of L.A. Valley Historical Museum Association  
June 7, 1976

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Amestoy: I was assured by Austin and Chet that you are a real co-operative group and you wouldn't throw things at me and are interested in the valley and the past, the present, and the future. So, I thought, well, here it is. Of course, my own interest is in the San Fernando Valley generally, however, my specific interest is in Encino.

Our family connection with the Los Encinos Ranch began in 1878 when a Mr. Oxarart took over the ranch from Mr. Garnier because of a mortgage of 18,000 dollars. Mr. Oxarart was a man of mystery, a bachelor and a very dapperman. He was quite a ladies man, but he didn't let anybody catch him. My mother was related to Mr. Oxarart and she tells me that occasionally, he drank too much and at such times he would offer much joy to his friends because he would pass out gold coins. My mother said that he would get so drunk that coins would drop out of his pockets.

Now, let's see, this is a little early for that picture, however at his death, he left the ranch to my mother's uncle who's name was Gless, Simon's Gless (is calling?). He later gave it to my grandfather who was his father-in-law. The price that my grandfather paid for the ranch, was \$100,000 for 4460 acres. He had to sell his stock in the farmer's and merchant's national bank, which he was one of the founder's and directors, in order to raise the money. He died 12 days later after he bought the ranch, leaving the property to his children. That is a picture of his children, now the one on the left upper is my father. His name was, well at that time, we spoke all languages, we spoke Spanish, French, and English, and Basque. They were all named by my father, for instance was Peter, he was also Pedro, and he was also Pierre, so they had three names and it all depended on who was talking to them as to what they would call him, but that is my father on the left upper. He was the third oldest boy. The one in the middle was the fourth oldest boy and the one on the right hand side was the oldest boy, that is Tony, Anthon, Anthony, the one on the left was John Batiste, who was John the Baptist, or John in English. The next one was Mrs., she later became Mrs. Santuse, I don't know whether you have ever heard of the Santuse school or well that is my aunt who was married to Mr. Santuse who later who was the French consul here in Los Angeles. The one in the middle was the youngest boy, my uncle Joe, who was a very fine handball player, in fact he and a another man won a national

yes



handballs championship at one time for the athletic club. The one on the right, the lady or girl on the right is the youngest child of that family. Her name was Juanita and she was married to Mr. Gless who was the prior owner of the ranch. All in all, there were thirteen children in my father's family, of which these are the survivors, many of them died at birth, my father was a twin, my Uncle Johnny was a twin, but none of the twin's survived, so we'll pass on from that.

Voice from the audience: You might point that how Si's father if you could see closer, is an exact replica of Bing Crosby.

Simon Amestoy: He look very much like Bing Crosby, my father did.

Voice: He could be Gary Crosby who plays on the TV every once in a while.

Si: Very much, I have some pictures, If I showed you'd say that's Bing Crosby, well that was my father.

Probably the most interesting features of the Encino Ranch is the existence of the warm springs. I would like to read a little excerpt from the diary of Father Crespi who was with the party that discovered this area, I mean that particular area. I'll read it to you. "We reached a very large pool of fresh water, where we meet two very large villages of friendly practical heathens. By the way, this was in 1769. The men, women, and children, must amount to nearly 200 souls, they all stood with their basins full of sorts of pinola drink, Mr. Avila, you ought to know what that is, and sage tea to be given us for our refreshment. We drew off a little into the shade of a great white oak tree to make camp and told them to bring it to us at the camp and so they did. This was on a hot August afternoon, 1769. To this day the continued to rise and I recall that women visitors invariably washed their hair there because of the softness of the water. They felt that their hair was in wonderful condition after washing at the springs. The water ran down a small creek, the overflow ran down a small creek and eventually ended up in the Los Angeles River. There was a bath house located right near the spring because we didn't have hot water because these springs were hot water. And the bath house contained four different separate rooms with a bathtub in each one. Now three of the bathtubs were made of wood and they don't leak because as the water goes in them the wood swells and they don't leak. The other one was a regular type of tub. I like the big ones because you almost swim in them. The small spring, of which there were two. Was covered by a ramada. Now, I think again you will know what a ramada is, Mr.



Avila. And it was about six feet tall and it covered the area of where they did the washing. This the washing of clothes. They generally didn't have to heat the water, except my clothes, they definitely had to heat the water to get the dirt out of them. Ha! Ha! Ha! The drinking water was kept fresh because we had Oyas. An Oyas is an earthenware type of prop that is hung up and the water is put into that and is covered with sacks. Everytime you took a drink and you didn't want anymore and you had some left you'd pour it on the sack because that would continue to keep the water cool. El Camino Real, I'll tell you about, we'll start right here, this is El Camino Real, the King's Road on Ventura Blvd. As you can see it was unimproved. Several indians were living in the area, now known as the Encino Reservoir. This is the picture, it was taken on Ventura Blvd. and I think it must have been in the early 19 uh, oh probably 1904, 1905, 1906, around there. Now this and Ventura there was right in front of our ranch home, where our ranch house set back about one hundred and fifty yards, from there, so you don't see the house. The occupants of the were two indians, I don't know what tribe, however, Shoshonis had been in that area so let's say they're Shoshonis. The man on the left, on your left, no it's the man on your left was known as Soness (Sp?) He was a full blooded indian and he was a widower and he had a son, a very handsome indian boy, real fine looking the man on the right was Napoleon and he was just single, he lived with dog. And these people spoke Spanish. Now, these indians were always welcome at our home and they shared in the food at any time. And they showed the highest respect and love for my father. Now, Napoleon, again on the drinking problem used to like to sneak a few once in awhile. And more than a few oftentimes. And I can still remember when I was a kid, he would, in as much his name was Napoleon, NA-POLE-YAWN, he called himself which was the French and he would pound on his chest like this and say "(Something in Spanish)" which means I am Napoleon the first. And he would address that not only the people that were there, but also to his dog, he'd go to his dog and tell him he was Napoleon the first.

Another occupant of the reservoir area, was a man by the name of George Riley, an Englishman, and he had a aviary, he raised bees. In as much as there was a great amount of sage in that particular area, this was sage honey. Our home place is now a historical park as you probably know and had nine rooms in it. It was built in 1849 by Mr. Delloso, one of the prior owners. There was no running water, no plumbing inside and of course no electricity.



P  
The two story building, as well as the guitar shaped enclosure for the lake was built in 1871 by Mr. Garnier. The large two story stone building was used as a kitchen and dining room and water was piped in there. There were two dining rooms, one for the workmen and one for the family. During harvest time, it was sometimes necessary for the workmen to eat in two or more shifts in order to accomodate them all because there were that many people working at that particular season. The men were summoned to dinner by a Chinamen who beat on a disc. If you know anything about farming, you used discs to cut up dirt. Either that or a triangle shaped iron which he would beat with a smaller piece of iron and you could hear this miles away. Now the first bell meant get ready for dinner. And the second bell meant come and get it! I mentioned that they were called to dinner by a Chinaman. All of the cooks that we had on the ranch were Chinese. At that time there were strict immigration laws against the entry of Chinese so that there no women Chinese, so these women came on their own and would work until such time as they had accumulated sufficient funds to go back to China where they had left their families. P

I remember one instance of a man, in fact they called him Charlie. Of course we practically called every Chinamen Charlie even though his name might have been Lin or Fin or anything else, they called him Charlie. He was a professor at the University of China and came to the U.S. to get some money. So, he worked for us for a good number of years, I'd say seven, eight, nine years and uh when he left to resume his professorship at the University of China, he wanted me to go. But my mother being a sissy said no. The cooking was

The cooking was done in a wood stove and is has always amazed what wonderful pastries, lady fingers, cream puffs, pies, cakes, were served to sixty or seventy people at a time. The pies were made of dried fruits like apricots, peaches, apples, prunes, raisons. While pudding was made, a combination of rice and pudding whipped together with raisons and prunes.

The dried fruit was stored in a building specifically for the storage of fruits and vegetables of this kind. I recall that one day that my sister and I were lost. At least that's what everybody thought that we were lost. Well, the chinaman found us, finally, we were in the storage house sitting on the floor eating dried apricots, dried prunes, particularly until we were just about ready to pop. Well,



most of the next we spent close to the outhouse.

The second floor of the building, by the way, I might tell you that this is my mother on the left and that's my father, my sister on the left. And here's yours truly, the little guy, on the right hand side. The second floor of the building was used as a sleeping dormitory for the working man. The upstairs could accomodate anywhere between twenty-five and and thirty men for sleeping. In addition to this there were about fifteen or twenty small one room huts built along the olive trees, many of which are still standing and well over a hundred years old. And that's where they slept. Olive trees are really true desert plant, because I don't remember those things ever being watered. Never! They're still there.

Our workmen were Indian, Spanish, French, Basque, and we had a couple of Texas cowboys. Of course we spoke all different languages. Getting back to the cowboys, one cowboy was the idol of all the young ladies who visited our home. I don't know why, but he was about six feet two, he weighed a hundred and seventy pounds, thin faced, his two front teeth were missing. But he was a rugged individual and he could really ride a horse and could he shoot with a six shooter. I recall many incidences when he would bring a headless rattlesnake home because he'd shot it with his six shooter the head cut right off. But anyway, it might have been jealousy, but I don't know why all the women fell for him.

We had four barns on our place. They were available for the storage of farm equipment, barley, wheat, hay, and they were located at different of the ranch. By the way, I might mention, that at that time the main was crop was barley, and as far as you could see were barley fields and it was a gorgeous sight. Between our place and Hollywood, I can only remember one building and that is where the Sportmen's Lodge is at the present time and that was another ranch. Between our place and Hollywood there was nothing else, as I recall. Most of the work was done with early farming equipment and powered by mules and horses. We had three stallions as well as one fertile jack ass who assured a continuance of the horse power. The black smith made all the horseshoes and fabricated all the machine parts for the equipment upkeep. A harness maker repaired all the harness and made new harness. A stable buck cared for the stock and a general handyman was responsible for the milking of the cows. As for food, we had pigs, cattle, chickens, sheep,



and they provided the meat for the ravenous workers.

It was one of my jobs and one of my sister's jobs to gather eggs which the free roaming hens laid in the most secret places. You might find them anyplace and sometimes when I did find the eggs, I found a snake, either a non-poisonous snake or some other rodent or animal had gotten there before I did, so I didn't get any eggs. Small game was very plentiful. There were doves, quail, rabbit. And during hunting season, many of the city officials used to come out to our ranch to hunt. Now, I remember when Sheriff ~~Cline~~ (?), Eugene Biscaloose (SP?), Leo Carrillo, Hal Roach of the studios, Mr. McLaughlin, who was president of the Union Hardware. Let's see if I can pick anybody out. It's a little bit dim, but uh. It's a little difficult for me to see from here. Never mind! I'll just mention a couple of people, there were the two Santuse (SP?) brothers were there, my dad is in the picture. Mr. Bochey (SP?) I mean Mr. Roiere (SP?) who owned the T. Bochey Company. I don't know whether you ever, that people will recall this, It was the largest wholesale liquor house in the city of Los Angeles. My sister married his son eventually.

Now, those are doves that they were hunting. I quit hunting when I was about fifteen because a dove died in my hand and I thought, this is it, I'm through! I didn't hunt anymore and I still don't hunt. Because I well I couldn't see shooting those harmless things anymore. There were also deer up in the hills, south of the Ventura Blvd., however, they only hunted of course during season. There were seasons established at that time. And, it was held to a minimum. I recall one time, however when one of the men, an uncle of mine was in with the cattle, herding them, and he shot what he thought was a deer and it turned out to be an elk. Now you don't have elks in this area. We don't know where that elk came from, but of course it was, killing was prohibited at that time, but nevertheless, it was an accidental thing.

As long as we are talking about some animals, I might that we here so much about the swallows of Capistrano. Well we've had our shares. The roofing <sup>8</sup> ~~handing~~ over were all cluttered with these swallows nests. Now a swallow is probably the best architect and the best contractor you can imagine because what they do is they used to sweep down over the lake and pick up a little bit of the water and then go and get some dirt and make a sort of a little mud thing. And then they would go and make a little nest in a corner. And they are shaped like a ball, a half



a ball with a little hole in the center where the bird enters in. And we had, well, under the entire roof were these swallows on all the barns.

Oh, another source of food, were pigeons. We had a house, that uh. I don't know whether you have seen the Capitol Records building in Hollywood, it's a round shaped building. That was the shape of our pigeon house. And uh, we had thousands and thousands of pigeons with oh I would say hundreds and hundreds of nesting facilities in this building. Now, pigeons are so prolific that we couldn't walk on the floor in that building because you'd either step on pigeons or eggs. They were just there by the thousands! We didn't have to feed them because they could go out in the fields because there was sufficient grain left from the harvest that they could eat forever out there. So, one time my father decided to sell about two thousand of them, so one fellow came over and got them. And in about a month or so, several hundred were back again, so, it was a pretty good deal.

Now let's talk about some of the funny things that we had. My greatest pleasure, I think was horse back riding. And if you don't know how to ride you can end up with blisters on your rear end. And some of my city cousins learned that because we used to take them horse back riding. I've been thrown by a horse, kicked by a horse, had my saddle slip under the horse, bitten by a horse, but I never told my father about any of this because I preferred riding to walking. ¶ I believe I told that we had no inside plumbing. Visitors using the outhouse had to walk about fifty feet from the adobe and sometimes they found themselves prisoners at the hands or wings I should say of flocks of geese. The geese would establish themselves around this outhouse and you just tried to get out. Well, this was real fun for us because for these city people to come out there and have to stay in the outhouse and hour or so more than they expected, why this was real pleasure for us.

What I'll do, Chet, I'll go over some of those pictures with them after we finish and even though I could of put them in while I was talking. Nevertheless, we'll cover it.

Sunday's were generally rest days, we were taking baths, washing clothes and playing music was the order of the day. There were always three or four workmen who played the guitar and violin. And they sang and danced. The favorite dance was "La Hota". Again Mr. Avila, do you



more there, Chet.

Now this was taken at the time that the post office was dedicated in Encino. Now, this again is another page picture of the same, at the same time, now this was Don Amechy (SP) on the left. The tall fellow and then my father. Uh, I can't make out, there's Al Jolson! I think standing behind the flag it looks like me. And uh, it looks like Al Jolson. Bill Harris is in the picture, but I can't pick him out from here. Go ahead, Chet if you have something else. You got any others you can go back to?

Chet: I think that's it, unless.

Amestoy: Let me go back and there's a few in there I might out. This is also at the time of dedication of the home place, as a historical monument. And uh, I can't tell the people there of course, but I know my father was in that. This was a ranch scene, some of the workmen, I think my mother and the two children, one if my sister and the other is myself, the little guy. Oh this, I mentioned that one of the former owners was Mr. Gless who was my grandfather's son-in-law and he was married to my father's sister. This is there home in Boyle Heights. I thought this was the most gorgeous home that I'd ever seen. I've gone there since then and it's not so big and it's so gorgeous but I think that with age and time, things get smaller. But I thought it was the most beautiful house that I've ever seen. I think in there there's uh, my mother is in there, my aunts are in there, my uncle and some of my cousins . O.K., Chet you got anything else.

Chet: I don't think so.

Amestoy: Oh well, that's about it folks.

ROUND OF APPLAUSE.

know La Hota? And my mother was a real expert on La Hota. My father didn't like music and he couldn't dance. So, a bad combination. I used to watch it for a little while and then I'd get tired and of course, I preferred riding horses. Well, these are some of the memories that come to me about my early life on the ranch. But it soon became apparent that we were going to have to leave the ranch because my sister was beyond school age and I was too. And, uh, we, uh had to get some schooling. But no can say that we weren't learning something from our association with the working men. Much to my mother's embarrassment when guests were present, my sister might come out with son of a bitch with as much emphasis as a truck driver. So, my father bought a home around Pico and Vermont in Los Angeles. And we started Catholic schools and the nuns were very good teachers, but I think that we taught them a few words that they didn't have in their vocabulary.

I really wish that the youngsters today had the life that I had when I was a boy. Nobody could have had such a good life. To look over and everything was ours, 4460 acres and the next ranch was yours too because you could go over there and that was yours, so I don't think that anybody had the life I had when I was a youngster. I'm gonna try something on you folks. As a parting shot. I'm going to ask you a question in Basque and all you have to do is answer me and I'll tell you what to say. You answer me with one word. It's pronounced like you would buy something, buy. Actually the correct spelling of the word is bhi, but you pronounce it buy. And I'm going to ask you one question because, the Basque race is down to about two million. And in as much as I'm Basque, I'm trying to recruit people. I'm going to ask this question: "XOXOXOXO XOXOXOXO?" Now you answer, "Bhi". (Everyone says "Bhi") Now we have just enlisted maybe forty people to the Basque race. You said you were Basque. Laughter. So thank you.

Voice from audience: You wanna to tell them who some of these are. Amestoy: Oh yea, I'll tell ya who some of these people, the one on the right is my Uncle Mr. Santuse. The next man is Arthur Treacher (SP) The next man is Edward Everett Horton (SP). The next man, the short one is my father. Uh, Al Jolson is in there somewhere, I think that Barney Oldfield (SP) is in that one too. However I don't see a cigar in there so maybe he was out buying another cigar. But uh you got some